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IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

# X-FACTOR

## PREVIOUSLY...

ARCADE, THE MAD-AS-A-HATTER ASSASSIN, HAS BEEN HIRED BY A MYSTERIOUS INDIVIDUAL™ TO DISPATCH RICTOR, AND POSSIBLY THE REST OF X-FACTOR, AND EVEN THE ENTIRETY OF MUTANT TOWN. TO THAT END, HE HAS CAPTURED RICTOR, CRUCIFIED HIM UPSIDE DOWN AND SET A RAZOR-SHARP PENDULUM SWINGING HIS WAY, WHILE THE REST OF OUR HEROES COPE WITH THE FACT THAT MUTANT TOWN (A.K.A. THE MIDDLE EAST SIDE) HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A GIGANTIC JUNGLE..

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ANY LAST WORDS, RICTOR, BEFORE WE PART COMPANY?
SCREW YOU!!
YES, WELL... THAT'S GOING TO BE PROBLEMATIC, WON'T--
RICTOR!!
MONET! OH, THANK GOD!
CRASH
HOW DO YOU GET YOURSELF INTO THESE KINDS OF SITUA--

ZZZZAAAAKKKTT!
EEYARRRRHHH!!!...
MONET!
I HARDLY THINK SHE'S IN ANY CONDITION TO HEAR YOU.
SHE'S STILL ALIVE! THAT WAS ENOUGH WATTAGE TO KILL TWENTY GROWN MEN. SHE'S A SPUNKY ONE.
SO...
WHAT ELSE YOU GOT?

THAT WAS CLOSE! SHE COULD HAVE--
SHE COULD HAVE NOTHING. AS YOU SEE, I WAS PREPARED FOR A RESCUE ATTEMPT.
LISTEN! I HAVE A SCORE TO SETTLE WITH RICTOR AND HIS MUTANT PALS! THEY COST ME MY POSITION WITH THE PURIFIERS--!
FROM WHAT YOU TOLD ME, MR. TAYLOR, YOU DID THAT ALL BY YOURSELF, ENLISTING LITTLE JULIO INTO YOUR ORGANIZATION WITHOUT PROPERLY CHECKING HIS BACKGROUND.
AND BESIDES...
PEOPLE DON'T COME TO ARCADE IF THEY MERELY HAVE "SCORES TO SETTLE." THEY COME TO ME TO WATCH THEIR ENEMIES WRIGGLE LIKE WORMS ON HOOKS.
FURTHERMORE, YOU EXPRESSED MORE THAN JUST IRE WITH DEAR JULIO. YOU WERE POSITIVELY FUMING ABOUT THE WHOLE OF "MUTANT TOWN."
YOUR REASONING AS TO WHY THEY STILL PRESENT A THREAT WAS MOST COMPELLING.

"YOU ASSERTED THAT RECENT EVENTS HAVE SHOWN THE MUTANT GENE IS STILL ALIVE, WELL, AND CAPABLE OF MANIFESTING.
"WHO BETTER TO CAUSE THAT MANIFESTATION THAN A MAN AND WOMAN BOTH OF WHOM ARE CARRYING THE RECESSIVE MUTANT GENE?
"BEST TO BE RID OF THE LOT OF THEM. SO WHY SETTLE ON AVENGING YOURSELF ON RICTOR...
"...WHEN WITH MY AID, YOU CAN DISPOSE OF THE LOT OF THEM? WHY THINK SMALL WHEN YOU CAN THINK BIG?
"WHY BE TIMID...
"...WHEN YOU CAN BE BOULDER?
"BOULDER? BOLDER? GET IT?
"SIGH NEVER MIND."
The Only Game in Town
PART 2
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VALENTINE DE LANDRO PENCILER
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JEROMY COX COLORIST
VC'S CORY PETIT LETTERER
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JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER

OUTTA THE WAY! OUTTA THE--
CCRUUUNNCH!
YEAH, THIS IS GETTING OLD FAST.
THINK I'M... PULLIN' MY ARMS LOOSE...JUST ANOTHER FEW--
AW, IT FIGURES!!!!
MOVE IT, LADY! MOVE IT BEFORE--!

KNCH
NEVER MIND! FORGET IT!
KNCH
I GOT'CHA COVERED!
ALLEEYYYY--
--OOOOP!!!

WE'VE NEVER BEEN MORE VULNERABLE.
WE'RE DOWN TWO MEMBERS...
...EVERY OTHER X-GROUP IN THE AREA HAS VANISHED...
...AND OUR LOCATION IS PUBLICLY KNOWN.
AT ANY GIVEN TIME, SOMEONE CAN ATTACK US IN SOME UNEXPECTED--
OH, HELL.
BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDA
DOES MY INTERNAL MONOLOGUE HAVE TO BE THAT ACCURATE?

OH, THAT ONE MISSED BY MICROMETERS, RICTOR, I REALLY DO THINK THE NEXT PASS IS GOING TO DIVIDE AND CONQUER.
ANY LAST WORDS AS A MAN?
KRRRRK!
CRAK
THUNK
HOLY--!!
ZOUNDS! WHAT FOUL BUSINESS IS THIS?!
ARE YOU OKAY, RICTOR?
DOES IT LOOK LIKE I'M OKAY?!?

HE'S GETTING AWAY!
HE'S NOT GETTING AWAY. NONE OF THEM ARE. ALTHOUGH, SHOULD THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPEN, THERE'S ALWAYS THE FAILSAFE OPTION. NOT YOUR FIRST CHOICE, I KNOW, BUT AT LEAST YOU'D HAVE THE LAST LAUGH.
HOWEVER, I SEE THE CITIZENRY APPEARS DETERMINED TO MAKE A HASTY EXIT.
"CAN'T HAVE THAT. NO, WE CAN'T."
WHAT THE HELL?
WHAT IS THAT?!
WHO CARES?
THERE'S ROOM FOR ME TO GET THROUGH!
KAITLIN, WAIT! IT CAN'T BE THAT EASY...!

EEEEYIIIIIIIII...
THAT'S GOING TO LEAVE A MARK.
NOW THEN...
LET'S SEE HOW MADROX IS DOING.
OOOO, NOT MUCH BETTER THAN KAITLIN.

BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDA!
BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDA!
BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDA!
BEHIND YOU.
COLD, DEAD EYES IN THIS ONE. SHE WOULD HAVE MOWED DOWN AS MANY DUPES AS I CREATED TO GET TO ME.
IT'S EVERYTHING I CAN DO NOT TO KILL HER WITH MY BARE HANDS.
I HAVE TO REMIND MYSELF THAT SHE DESERVES BETTER. THAT SHE'S HUMAN.
KRAK!
IT'S NOT EASY.
NOT WHEN SOMEONE IS AS INHUMAN AS--

WHAT THE HELL...?
THUNK!
THUP THUP THUP
A ROBOT. A FREAKING ROBOT.
A FREAKING LIFELIKE ROBOT IN AN ENVIRONMENT CONSISTING OF EVER-SHIFTING DEATHTRAPS.
HE MAY HAVE MOVED BEYOND THE STANDARD AMUSEMENT PARK MOTIF HE USED TO FAVOR...
BUT MY KEEN DEDUCTIVE MIND SAYS THAT ARCADE IS BEHIND THIS.
THAT AND HE HAD HIS FACE AND NAME SCRAWLED ON THE BIG ROCK. THAT WAS ALSO A TIP-OFF.

THE JUNGLE JUST DISAPPEARED. I'M NOT SURE IF THAT'S A POSITIVE THING OR NOT.
HELP ME... PLEASE...
OH JEEZ...IF I ABSORB HIM, IT'S GOING TO HURT LIKE HELL, EVEN WEAKEN ME.
BUT AM I JUST SUPPOSED TO STAND HERE AND LET HIM--
BLAM
ARRHHHH!!!

STUPID. STUPID STUPID STUPID.
SHOULD HAVE REALIZED THAT I WASN'T FEELING ANY PSYCHIC LINK TO HIM...TO IT. IT'S ANOTHER ROBOT.
I LET MYSELF GET DISTRACTED AND NOW--
HEY THERE.
ROCK OUT.
CRUNCH

HANDS·ON MOBILE
YOU GOT HER, RIC?
GOT HER! EVERYTHING'S FI--
UH OH.
TERRY! MADROX! CATCH HER!
WHAT SAY YOU, BRAVE RICTOR? I DID NOT HEAR-- OOOOOOFF!!!
VROOOOOH
VROOOOOH
VROOOOOH

CRIPES, NO ONE'S DRIVING THE CARS!
NICE ONE, TERRY!

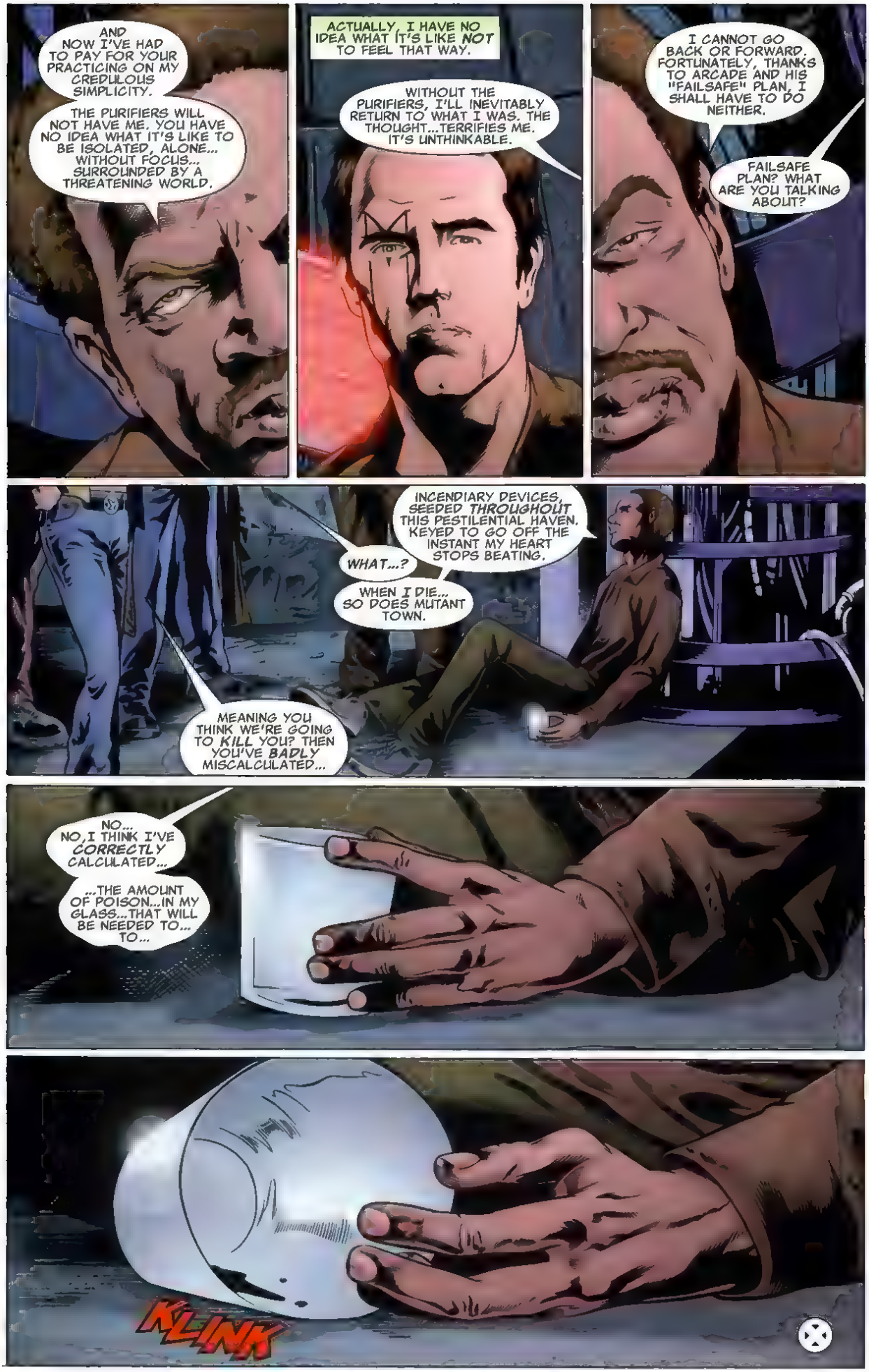
IT'S NOT AS IF WE HAVEN'T BEEN UNDER STRESS BEFORE. HAVEN'T HAD TO DEAL WITH SITUATIONS WHERE EVERYONE'S OUT TO GET US.
IT'S PRETTY MUCH OUR STATUS QUO.
BUT AT LEAST WE ALWAYS HAD AN IDEA OF WHERE WE STOOD.
RAHNE KEPT US ANCHORED SPIRITUALLY, AND LAYLA'S KNOWLEDGE, AS UNPREDICTABLE AS IT WAS, GAVE US AN EDGE.
NOW...
...NOW IT'S LIKE WE'RE HAVING TO FIGHT OUR WAY UP FROM UNDER.
WHERE'S THE DEAD MAN WALKING WHO'S BEHIND THIS?
YOU OKAY, ST. CROIX?
I'M FINE.
YOU SURE? YOU GOT A HELL OF A JOLT--
I SAID I'M FINE, SAM. COME ON.
DID SHE JUST CALL ME--?
LET IT GO.
A WISE CHOICE.

THE X-MEN MAY NOT HAVE BEEN OUR FAVORITE GROUP. WE HAD MORE OF A FRACTIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM THAN ANYTHING ELSE.
BUT AT LEAST I ALWAYS KNEW THAT, IF THINGS *REALLY* WENT SOUTH, THEY HAD OUR BACKS.
SO WHO HAS OUR BACKS NOW?
MAJOR! VALERIE COOPER, O*N*E. GIVE ME A SITREP, PLEASE.
SOME SORT OF ENERGY FIELD WHICH CAME INTO EXISTENCE AROUND THE MIDDLE EAST SIDE AT APPROXIMATELY TWENTY-ONE HUNDRED HOURS.
CIRCLES THE ENTIRE PERIMETER. THERE'S BEEN AT LEAST ONE CIVILIAN CASUALTY, AND I'VE ALREADY LOST TWO TANKS THAT TRIED TO CROSS THE THRESHOLD.
HAVE WE HEARD FROM X-FACTOR?
ISN'T THAT THE MUTIE GROUP THAT CAME OUT AGAINST THE REGISTRATION ACT?
YES.
NOT A WORD. YOU THINK THEY'RE BEHIND THIS?
MY GUESS IS THEY'RE SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.

WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING HERE?!?
LADY, SHUT UP OR I'M GOING TO SHUT YOU UP!
DARLING, WHAT DID YOU DO, STICK YOUR FINGER IN A SOCKET?
SHUT UP.
WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!
GOOD PEOPLE, I ASSURE YOU WE HEROES HAVE A HANDLE ON IT.
WELL, YES, THAT IS TRUE. I CANNOT DENY THE INEVITABILITY OF--
CYCLOPS, STEP BACK. I DON'T NEED YOU BLEEDING ON ME.
WAIT... WHAT? CYCLOPS?
JUST DO WHAT SHE SAYS. YOU SURE THIS IS GOING TO WORK, MONET?
WHAT, YOU MEAN JACKING MY COMM UNIT INTO THIS ROBOT HEAD TO SEE IF I CAN TRACK WHERE IT'S RECEIVING COMMAND TRANSMISSIONS FROM?
NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT. CLEARLY I'M JUST WASTING MY TI--
SHREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
AHHH!!!!
SON OF A--!
WHAT THE HELL...!
FEEDBACK. VERY HIGH PITCHED.
Y'THINK?!?
WHICH INDICATES THAT THE POINT OF ORIGIN IS CLOSE.
HOW CLOSE?
VERY.

AS MUCH AS I HATE THE IDEA OF DEATH, DESTRUCTION AND MAYHEM...
...I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT, IN A SICK WAY, WE OWE ARCADE A DEBT.
THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT WE NEEDED TO PULL TOGETHER AS A TEAM.
ALL RIGHT, ARCADE! YOU--
SAVE THE DRAMATIC SPEECHES. YOU JUST MISSED HIM.
HE HAD AN ESCAPE HATCH UNDER THAT CHAIR OVER THERE.
OH, NO HE DOESN'T!
MONET, WAIT! IT--
SOME DAYS I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY I BOTHER.

IT'S YOU! TAYLOR!
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THE FREAKING PURIFIERS WERE BEHIND THIS!
OH, YOU SHOULD HAVE, HUH?
GET UP! GET UP SO I CAN POUND THE--
SAVE YOUR THREATS, FREAK. YOU CAN'T HURT ME. NOT ANYMORE.
NO ONE CAN. NOT AFTER THE PURIFIERS EXPELLED ME.
BECAUSE OF ME, RIGHT? I GET TO TAKE CREDIT FOR THAT.
YEAH, RIGHT. AS IF A MURDEROUS SLIME LIKE YOU HAS A SOUL.
YOU WANT TO TAKE CREDIT FOR KILLING MY SOUL? GO RIGHT AHEAD.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I WAS BEFORE THE PURIFIERS TOOK ME IN. I WAS LOST. A DRUG ADDICT, DROWNING IN MY OWN FILTH.
THEY SAW MY POTENTIAL. THEY CLEANED ME UP, BELIEVED IN ME.
THEY RESTORED MY HUMANITY. I'D HAVE WALKED THROUGH FIRE FOR THEM.
I THOUGHT I SAW THE SAME POTENTIAL IN YOU, YOUNG MAN.
I ADMIT IT. YOU FOOLED ME. I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE A SPY.
GOOD ON YOU.


AND NOW I'VE HAD TO PAY FOR YOUR PRACTICING ON MY CREDULOUS SIMPLICITY.
THE PURIFIERS WILL NOT HAVE ME. YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE ISOLATED, ALONE... WITHOUT FOCUS... SURROUNDED BY A THREATENING WORLD.
ACTUALLY, I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO FEEL THAT WAY.
WITHOUT THE PURIFIERS, I'LL INEVITABLY RETURN TO WHAT I WAS. THE THOUGHT...TERRIFIES ME. IT'S UNTHINKABLE.
I CANNOT GO BACK OR FORWARD. FORTUNATELY, THANKS TO ARCADE AND HIS "FAILSAFE" PLAN, I SHALL HAVE TO DO NEITHER.
FAILSAFE PLAN? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
INCENDIARY DEVICES, SEEDED THROUGHOUT THIS PESTILENTIAL HAVEN, KEYED TO GO OFF THE INSTANT MY HEART STOPS BEATING.
WHAT...?
WHEN I DIE... SO DOES MUTANT TOWN.
MEANING YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO KILL YOU? THEN YOU'VE BADLY MISCALCULATED...
NO... NO, I THINK I'VE CORRECTLY CALCULATED...
...THE AMOUNT OF POISON...IN MY GLASS...THAT WILL BE NEEDED TO... TO...
KLINK

# SECRET INVASION

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS • LEINIL FRANCIS YU

AN EIGHT PART MARVEL EPIC BEGINNING IN APRIL

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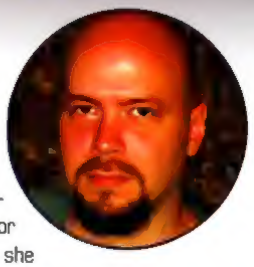
# LOOK WHO'S TALKING!

## EISNER-NOMINATED COMIC SCRIBE, JASON AARON



**MARVEL:** *So, first off, welcome to Marvel! How's it feel being a Marvel exclusive creator?*

**JASON AARON:** Feels like I'm a kid who's just been given access to the world's biggest, coolest toy chest. In other words, I'm loving every minute of it. Marvel has a ton of characters that fit my sensibilities as a writer, so I'm looking forward to a long and fruitful relationship.

**MARVEL:** *Your first Wolverine arc just started, hot on the heels of the acclaimed Messiah CompleX. How did you score that?*

**JA:** Well, the story I did for Wolverine #56 was very well-received, so editor Axel Alonso asked me to come back and do some more. The first story I ever had published was in the pages of Wolverine, so it was a nice bit of serendipity to find myself here again.

**MARVEL:** *What are you bringing to the Mystique/Wolverine dynamic?*

**JA:** Mostly a lot of anger and violence. Wolverine seems determined to kill Mystique, but she's not making it easy for him. In fact, she's throwing everything she possibly can at him. Like Wolverine, Mystique has been around a long, long time, and you don't get to be that old while living the kind of life she's lived without being a thoroughly dangerous individual, as we'll see.

**MARVEL:** *Ghost Rider is another title you took over. What do you think of the direction Daniel Way took the character in, revealing him to be an angel rather than a demon?*

**JA:** It left me in a great spot to be able to take things in a bit of a different direction, to introduce new challenges and new enemies, while still retaining the same action-fueled horror story feel that Ghost Rider fans have come to know and love. So while he may be an angel now, if you thought for a second that Ghost Rider was about to lose his edge, you're dead wrong.

If anything, things are only getting more and more wild from here on out.

**MARVEL:** *There's been a long debate over who should be Ghost Rider: Johnny Blaze or Danny Ketch. Which do you think made the better Ghost Rider, Danny or Johnny?*

**JA:** I'm totally partial to Johnny Blaze as Ghost Rider. To me, he's just always been the more compelling character, mainly because of how he's so tortured by the mistakes of his past, like say, selling his soul to the devil, that's a pretty big one. But I enjoyed the '90s Ghost Rider series too and we will be re-introducing some elements from that series in a very big way.

**MARVEL:** *Secret Invasion is coming, and it seems you've caught Skrull fever, too, with a tie-in arc in Black Panther. Can you tease what's going on there?*

**JA:** Quite simply, it's Wakanda versus the Skrulls, in a battle for the ages. Think Braveheart, but with green skin.

**MARVEL:** *If you could make only one person in the Marvel U. a Skrull, who would it be and why?*

**JA:** Matt Fraction. Because he's just too good of a writer to be human.

**'Nuff Said!**

# MEGAN

# XIII

# THE MINUTEMEN

SCANS BY DIZZY